DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 210 017 IR 009 819

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TITLE Knowledge and Use of Agricultural Indexes and Abstracts by a University Agriculture Faculty.
PUB DATE Nov 81
NOTE 10p.; For related document, see IR 009 724.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Abstracts; *Agricultural Colleges; *Agriculture; College Faculty; *Indexes; Questionnaires; Use Studies
IDENTIFIERS *Western Illinois University

ABSTRACT

This study of the usage of agriculture indexes and abstracts finds a lack of familiarity with most of the titles by a majority of the faculty surveyed. Of 16 faculty members, all having doctorates in some speciality in agriculture, nine responded to the questionnaire which listed 30 publications and offered answer choices of "Currently Use," "Have Used," or "Know About." The questionnaire, annotated with the totals of each category, is included. (RAA)

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KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF AGRICULTURE INDEXES AND ABSTRACTS BY A UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURE FACULTY

by

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IR 009819

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November 1981

I. Introduction

Indexes and abstracts are very important (and expensive) parts of a library holdings and their availability and use determine to a great extent the use of other parts of the collection, particularly periodicals. Although related, the two forms are somewhat different in both function and value. As defined by ANSI (39.4-1968), "An index is a systematic guide to items contained in, or concepts derived from, a collection. These items or derived concepts are represented by entries arranged in a known or stated searchable order, such as alphabetical, chronological, or numerical." Completeness and accuracy of an index are extremely important because an index is the only approach to any body of literature. This is especially so for one as large as agriculture which now emanates from all literate areas of the world and is written in many languages. Without a finding device, the sources are essentially lost. An abstract, on the other hand, is a summary, digest, or abridgement of a book or article along with the bibliographical reference to the original. Abstracts usually are arranged in a classified or subject order with author and subject indexes. In the case of abstract journals, each issue and volume usually have such indexes and it is important that they do so. The abstract itself, when accurate and thorough, often serves as a surrogate because the literature of many subjects,

including agriculture, is too large for a person to read it all in the original. An added value of the abstract arises from the fact that it is usually written in English (and sometimes in French and German as well) and thus persons knowing only one or two languages can still utilize the literature.

This study of faculty use of agricultural indexes and abstracts was done at Western Illinois University in September, 1981. The survey was limited to the campus agriculture faculty and the titles listed in the questionnaire were only those currently available in the university library. The study was prompted by the observation that the collection, while quite extensive (and expensive to maintain), was lightly used by both agriculture faculty and students, but that confirmation should be sought before attempting to increase it.

II. The Agricultural Program

The undergraduate program offers majors and minors in Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Engineering/Mechanization, Agronomy, Animal Science, Horticulture, Agricultural Education, and Natural Resources Conservation. The department has grown rapidly in recent years and now has about 500 majors.

No graduate degree in agriculture is offered by this university alone. Students, may, however, enroll jointly with Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and take half of the course work toward a Master's degree here. The degree, however, is granted by SIU-C. Students may elect any of the majors listed above. Enrollment in this program is quite small and made up primarily of inservice people in the region.

III. The Agriculture Faculty

The total number is seventeen. Excluded from the count are two graduate assistants, one crop technician, and one farm manager. The latter has

the rank of Instructor but since he lacks a graduate degree in agriculture, and, for the most part, is not engaged in academic work, he was excluded. Left out also was one Associate Professor who was on sabbatical at the time of the survey. Another member of the department serves as Dean of the College of Applied Sciences. He was included, however, because he is quite close to the academic program even though he does not teach classes.

Of the sixteen faculty members sent questionnaires, all have doctorates in some specialty in agriculture including one with the degree in Agricultural Education.

IV. The Agriculture Collection

Monographs and non-periodical serials total about 5,825 volumes. This part of the collection has grown rapidly in recent years and is generally adequate for an undergraduate instructional program. Periodical titles total about 400, including U. S. government titles. In addition, there is an extensive collection of United States government publications available, including many of the bulletins of the Agriculture Experiment Stations. Probably the strongest part of the library holdings is the collection of indexes and abstracts treated in this study and which are listed in the questionnaire.

V. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was formed by preparing two lists of titles. The first contained, in alphabetical order, all indexes and abstracts on agriculture which are not CAB (Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux) abstract journals. This list had ten titles. The second listed the twenty CAB journals, again in alphabetical order. The two were stapled and sent as a single mailing. All titles on the lists are shelved in the University Library's Reference Department except for two (Fertilizer Abstracts and

Forestry Research in Progress) which are in the Government Publications Department in the same library.

Opposite each title were three spaces headed as follows: "Know About," "Have Used," and "Currently Use." Respondents were asked to check all spaces that applied. A copy of the questionnaire with a summary of responses follows.

VI. Results

Of the sixteen questionnaires sent, nine, or fifty-six percent, were returned. Since the total group is small, a much higher rate of return was hoped for but not really expected. A return of fifty percent on questionnaire studies is close to the norm. One is never certain how to interpret the non-returns but it seems safe to say that in all, or nearly all, cases they are not current users of the indexes and abstracts. But, for statistical purposes in this study the nonrespondents are ignored, leaving a total of nine as the basis of the summary.

Perhaps the most striking fact shown in the summary is that of the thirty titles listed only one, The Bibliography of Agriculture, was known to all nine respondents and only an additional one, Weed Abstracts, was known by even a majority, in this case by five persons. This came as a surprise because all respondents have a doctorate in some phase of agriculture and all are currently active in an academic program. This suggests that students of agriculture, even doctoral students, are not broadly exposed to the bibliography of the discipline, including some of the most basic titles. The affirmative responses reported in the colums "have used" and "currently use" average much lower, as expected, and none have a majority response.

AGRICULTURE INDEXES AND ABSTRACTS (check all squares that apply)	Know About	Have Used	Currently Use
Abstracts on Tropical Agriculture	4		1
Agronomy Abstracts 1961-1976	4	1	3
Apicultural Abstracts 1950-1966; 1968-1975	3	1	2
Bibliography of Agriculture	9	3	3
Current Advances in Plant Science	3	1	1
Dictionary Catalog of the National Agricultural Library	4	2	1
Fertilizer Abstracts Y3.T25:36	2		2
Forestry Research in Progress A94.2:F76	1		
Gardner's Abstracts	1		
Microbiology Abstracts, Section B: General Microbiology and Bacteriology	2		1

CAB (COMMONWEALTH AGRICULTURAL BUREAUX) ABSTRACT JOURNALS THAT WE SUBSCRIBE TO (check all squares that apply)	Know About	Have Used	Currently Use
Animal Breeding Abstracts	3	2	
Dairy Science Abstracts	2	1	
Field Crop Abstracts	2		1
Food Technology	1		1
Forestry Abstracts			
Helminthological Abstracts:			
A. Animal Helminthology	1		
B. Plant Nematology	1		
Herbage Abstracts			
Horticultural Abstracts	3	1	1
Index Veterinarius	1		

CAB (COMMONWEALTH AGRICULTURAL BUREAUX) ABSTRACT JOURNALS THAT WE SUBSCRIBE TO (Continued) (check all squares that apply)	Know About	Have Used	Currently Use
Nutritional Abstracts and Reviews:			
A. Human and Experimental			
B. Livestock Feeds and Feeding	1		
Plant Breeding Abstracts	1		
Review of Applied Entomology:			
A. Agricultural	2	1	1
B. Medical and Veterinary	1		
Review of Plant Pathology	4	2	
Soils and Fertilizers	2		2
Veterinary Bulletin	1	1	
Weed Abstracts	5	1	1
World Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Abstracts	2	1	

VII. Conclusions

Agriculture as a discipline is supported by an extensive collection of indexes and abstracting services. It is, in fact, better served than most subjects and the student, researcher or practitioner can retrieve the desired information with only moderate effort. Thus, the low level of knowledge and utilization of these services by this faculty is unfortunate. The questionnaire was not designed, however, to elicit reasons for non-use or minimal use so any explanation is largely conjecture. The lack of familiarity with most of the titles by a majority of the faculty does not speak well for the educational programs completed by them. It may be that agriculture is taught more as an applied rather than a theoretical subject with only a remote connection with the literature. This well might be true at the undergraduate level and particularly the lower division. All of the persons surveyed, however, have doctorates and all face a research and publication requirement for tenure and promotion. Thus, even though the instructional program here is largely undergraduate, it would seem that there should be a greater involvement with the literature.